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SUBJECT: FM OSKANIAN PRESENTS FOREIGN POLICY GOALS

Classified By: Poloff Masha Herbst for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Armenian FM Vartan Oskanian presented a succinct outline of Armenian foreign and domestic policy priorities during the Wilton Park Conference on the South Caucasus held in Yerevan November 6 - 10. Oskanian elaborated on Armenia's foreign policy of "complementarity," identified economic liberalization and democratization as the GOAM's top internal priorities, and the resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict and normalized relations with Turkey as Armenia's primary foreign policy goals. This cable is classified in deference to conference rules that all discussion be off the record. END SUMMARY.

"COMPLEMENTARITY" EXPLAINED

¶2. (C) Oskanian gave a sober and grounded exposition of Armenia's hallmark policy of "complementarity," which he characterized as a matter of being "considerate" of the interests of its neighbors and major regional players, such as Iran, Russia, the EU and the United States. (NOTE: "Complementarity," the watchword of Armenia's foreign policy wonks, entails maintaining strong relations with Russia and other CIS countries, but balancing those relations with Armenia's goals of improved ties to Western nations and Euro-Atlantic institutions, including the United States, the EU and NATO. END NOTE.) The foreign minister skillfully rebutted a negative local perception that Armenia is becoming "subjugated" to outside interests, characterizing Armenia's behavior instead as a complementarity success story.

¶3. (C) Oskanian embraced the reality that a number of influential states have legitimate interests in the South Caucasus, and Armenia is most successful when it can accommodate these various interests in a mutually cooperative, rather than confrontational way. "This whole notion of being considerate should not be confused with subjugation," he said. Rather than countering the common -- and perhaps correct -- perception that Armenia kowtows to Russia, Oskanian noted that Armenia could not have the relationship it did with Iran if it were not considerate of legitimate U.S. security concerns. He offered Armenia's participation in non-proliferation regimes, close monitoring of the border, and its transparency with the U.S about Armenia's relations with Iran as proof of the success of complementarity.

INTERNAL PRIORITIES

¶4. (C) According to Oskanian, Armenia has not wavered from its top two internal priorities -- economic liberalization and democratization -- since Armenian independence in 1991. Giving his own government a report card, Oskanian cited double-digit economic growth during the last six years despite border closures and a lack of resources as a sign that Armenia's economic story is a successful one. He said that Armenia was well on its way to becoming a democracy.

"GENOCIDE" RECOGNITION NOT A TOP FOREIGN POLICY GOAL

¶5. (C) Oskanian defined Armenia's top foreign policy priorities as the resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict and improved relations with Turkey. He said Armenia was doing everything possible to reach a balanced resolution on NK, but warned of the risks of a militant Azerbaijan determined to resolve the conflict through force. Oskanian was remarkably open at this conference about Armenia's current negotiating position, and he outlined that Armenia had shown new flexibility in "de-linking" a plebiscite on the status of N-K from a transfer of the occupied territory of Kelbajar. Oskanian said that the GOAJ's stance had become more rigid since oil dollars began to trickle into Baku. "When Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan was just a blueprint, it was easier to talk to the Azeris," he said. The foreign minister said he was doubtful that conflict resolution was near, citing upcoming Armenian and Azerbaijani elections.

¶6. (C) Oskanian said the government of Turkey should prime
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its population to accept normalized relations with Armenia. He emphasized that the GOAM did not demand Turkish recognition of the "genocide" as a precondition to normalization. He characterized the GOAM's position on "genocide" recognition in Turkey as a "moral obligation" that Armenia would like to see the GOT accept. Armenia was ready to resume diplomatic relations "without precondition."

COMMENT

¶7. (C) Oskanian's presentation exemplified the savvy pragmatism with which the foreign minister shepherds his country's interests in a tricky regional environment, packed with emotionally-charged political and economic challenges. Instead of railing self-indulgently against the many injustices Armenians perceive in their geopolitical context, (which always plays well on the domestic political scene), Oskanian takes a more positive approach. He patiently explains to his countrymen why it is best to play the cards they are dealt as best they can, rather than impotently berate the dealer on the rules of the game. We applaud him for that.
GODFREY